

FBI

Date: January 23, 1958

Transmit the following in \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type in plain text or code)Via AIRTEL AIRMAIL  
(Priority or Method of Mailing)

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

FROM: SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

SUBJECT: SS WILSON B. KEENE;  
 SS HIGHFLYER; SS GRANDCAMP, *Ac.*  
 Limitation of Liability, April 16 and  
 17, 1947; Petitions of Lykes Brothers  
 Steamship Company and Republic of France  
 Southern Texas Admiralty Numbers  
 1868, 1869, and 1870  
 ADMIRALTY MATTERS  
 OO: Houston

For the information of San Diego Office, the background of this case is as follows:

On 4/16/47, there was being loaded ammonium nitrate aboard the GRANDCAMP, a vessel owned and operated by the French Government. Also in the immediate area there was a vessel owned by Lykes Brothers, called the WILSON B. KEENE. Lykes Brothers also had another vessel which had been previously loaded with ammonium nitrate called the HIGHFLYER. Loading had taken place on a 24 hour basis on the GRANDCAMP; however, at 8:00 AM Hold #4 was opened to start daytime loading operations. No night loading had taken place on this hold on the previous night.

Shortly after longshoremen entered the hold they discovered smoke. Cause of the fire could very easily have been smoking aboard the vessel. The fire was fought by volunteer firemen and at 9:07 AM, after the captain

- ③ - Bureau (AM)  
 2 - Dallas (131-7) (AM)  
 2 - San Diego (AM) (Encl. 1)  
 1 - Houston

131-363-78

JAN 27 1958

JJD/mfh  
 (8)

RECORDED-92

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Special Agent in Charge

EX-135  
 Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_

FBI

Date:

Transmit the following in \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type in plain text or code)Via \_\_\_\_\_  
(Priority or Method of Mailing)

HO 131-39

had directed that the edges be batten down and steam poured into the holds, the GRANDCAMP exploded. No effort was made until 9:30 that same night to remove the HIGHFLYER from its mooring on the adjacent slit. This vessel was not removed and shortly after 1:00 AM on 4/17/47, it blew up too. 536 people were killed, hundreds injured, property damage was enormous.

The Bureau has conducted extensive investigation in this matter entitled "The Texas City Terminal Railway Company, vs. U. S. Civil Docket CA 535, U. S. District Court, SDT, Federal Court Claims Act", known as Texcit, in connection with a Federal Court Claims Act case which the Government lost in District Court but which was reversed in Circuit Court and was upheld in Supreme Court.

The French Government and Lykes Brothers have filed a petition in Federal Court to limit their liability. It should be noted that this cargo which blew up was being shipped by the French Government to France. The Government is preparing to go to Court on 3/4/58 to defend this action.

Bureau has instructed that all leads in this matter be covered and reported by 2/1/58.

b5 per DOJ-Civil Division

-2-

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge

FBI

Date:

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Via \_\_\_\_\_  
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HO 131-39

b5 per DOJ-Civil Division

-3-

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge

F B I

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Transmit the following in \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type in plain text or code)Via \_\_\_\_\_  
(Priority or Method of Mailing)

HO 131-39

b5 per DOJ-Civil Division

Previous Bureau instructions in this matter have stated "reports should not contain any evaluation of the potentiality as to good witnesses of the persons interviewed,

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Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Sent: \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge

F B I

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(Priority or Method of Mailing)

HO 131-39

(but) furnish a blank memorandum, suitable for dissemination, setting out the agents observations regarding these persons (or individuals interviewed) including appearance, manner of speaking, ability of the persons to express themselves, education and any other observations which would permit the Department to evaluate them as witnesses." One of the individuals to be interviewed under this request was CLARENCE HENRY WELLS, 1948 address, 504 Thirteenth Street, Texas City, Texas, signed statement located in 120-5-IV-178.

On 1/21/58, Mrs. WILLIE MAE ACRE of 721 Twentieth Avenue North, Texas City, advised that her brother is CLARENCE HENRY WELLS and that he resides at 2948 Ridgeway Drive, National City, California.

San Diego is requested expedite the handling of the interview of CLARENCE HENRY WELLS in accordance with Bureau instructions.

For the information of San Diego, the Bureau has been advised that the Houston Office has been unable to locate six of the twenty-one signed statements in this present request.

CLARENCE HENRY WELLS' signed statement is among those six missing signed statements.

Bureau has instructed the Dallas Office to search the records of the Federal Records Center in Fort Worth, Texas, in an effort to locate these signed statements. The Bureau further instructed that in the event the signed statements were not located, new signed statements should be obtained.

For the assistance of San Diego Office in this regard, there is being transmitted herewith photostatic copies of pages 987, 988, and 989 of the report of SA JAMES A.

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Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Sent: \_\_\_\_\_ M Per: \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge

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NO 131-39

FINLEY, dated 4/24/48, at Houston, Texas, which pages reflect the interview of WELLS as taken from the information furnished in his signed statement.

DALLAS:

If the signed statement of CLARENCE HENRY WELLS is obtained, forward same to San Diego Office to assist in the interview.

SAN DIEGO:

Interview CLARENCE HENRY WELLS in accordance with instructions set out above. This interview should not be delayed to await signed statement as Bureau deadline of 2/1/58 must be met.

-6-

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge

Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_

FBI

Date: 1/28/58

Transmit the following in \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type in plain text or code)Via Airtel Airmail  
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TO: DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

FROM: SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

SUBJECT: SS WILSON B. KEENE;  
SS HIGHFLYER; SS GRANDCAMP  
Limitation of Liability, April 16 and  
17, 1947; Petitions of Lykes Brothers  
Steamship Company and Republic of France  
1868, 1869, and 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTERS  
(OO: Houston)

For the information of the Mobile Office, the back-  
ground of this case is as follows:

On 4/16/47, there was being loaded ammonium nitrate aboard the GRANDCAMP, a vessel owned and operated by the French Government. Also in the immediate area there was a vessel owned by Lykes Brothers, called the WILSON B. KEENE. Lykes Brothers also had another vessel which had been previously loaded with ammonium nitrate called the HIGHFLYER. Loading had taken place on a 24 hour basis on the GRANDCAMP; however, at 8:00 AM Hold #4 was opened to start daytime loading operations. No night loading had taken place on this hold on the previous night.

Shortly after longshoremen entered the hold, they discovered smoke. Cause of the fire could very easily have been smoking aboard the vessel. The fire was fought by volunteer firemen and at 9:07 AM, after the captain had directed that the hatches be battened down and steam poured into the holds, the GRANDCAMP exploded. No effort was made until 9:30 that same night to remove the Highflyer from its mooring

③ - Bureau (AT) (AM)  
2 - Mobile (Encl. 1) (AM) (Reg. Mail -RRR)  
2 - Houston  
FMI/em  
(7)

RECORDED - 30

131-363-80

JAN 30 1958

EX-131

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge

Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_

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Date:

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b5 per DOJ-Civil Division

-2-

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b5 per DOJ-Civil Division

-3-

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge

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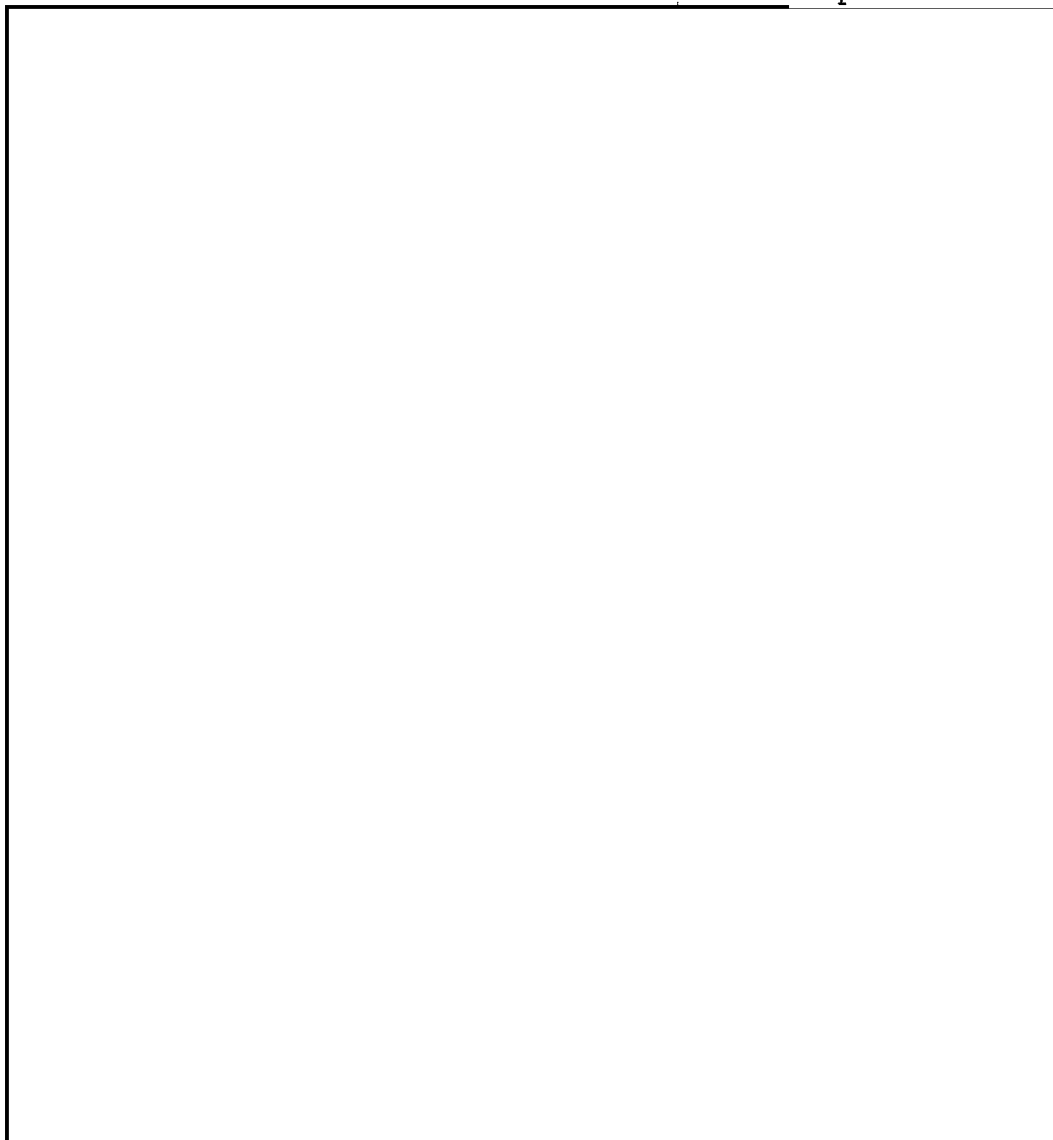
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-4-

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One of the individuals to be interviewed under this request was CECIL HOWARD WILLIAMS, Apartment #32, Third Avenue, Villas, North, Texas City, Texas, signed statement located in HO file 120-5-IV.

On 1/27/58 SAMMY HEMMELINE, Mom's Hotel, Texas City, Texas, advised that according to information received CECIL HOWARD WILLIAMS is presently working as a Cement Helper for Brown & Root, Incorporated, Houston, Texas, although WILLIAMS' place of employment is located in the State of Alabama.

On 1/27/58, BERNICE WILKINSON, Personnel Records Section, Brown & Root, Incorporated, Houston, Texas, advised that CECIL HOWARD WILLIAMS, social security #410-44-0095 is presently working as a Cement Helper on the SOS Plant for Brown & Root near McIntosh, Alabama. She stated WILLIAMS could be contacted through P.O. Box #13, Brown & Root, Inc., McIntosh, Alabama.

Mobile is requested to expedite the handling of the interview of CECIL HOWARD WILLIAMS in accordance with Bureau instructions. For the assistance of the Mobile Office, there is being forwarded herewith by registered mail the original signed statement of WILLIAMS taken in 1948, which signed statement should be returned to the Houston Office upon completion of the investigation by the Mobile Office.

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MOBILE:

Interview CECIL HOWARD WILLIAMS at McIntosh,  
Alabama in accordance with instructions set forth above.  
Bureau deadline of 2/1/58 must be met.

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Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge